

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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I. CHAPTER FOCUS

Since its founding St. Charles has been the retail and service center for the people of St. Charles and Campton Townships. Due to their convenient location and variety of goods and services offered, St. Charles businesses also served neighboring communities.

These neighboring communities experienced rapid development in the strong economy of the 1990's as the urban fringe moved westward. The increase of households in Batavia, Geneva, South Elgin and Elgin has been accompanied by new retail and service businesses, primarily in the Randall Road corridor. While the number of St. Charles households also grew, some of its previous "market share" of sales has shifted toward neighboring communities.

St. Charles is experiencing many changes in retail and service formats. The downtown area was historically a full service business location, with everything from variety stores to automobile dealers. Now its focus has evolved toward restaurants, entertainment, lodging and destination retail. As new "big-box" retailers have flocked to the Randall Road corridor in Geneva and Batavia, the former St. Charles Mall site sits empty and nearby sites on Randall Road are underutilized.

This Chapter examines the existing and future retail and service areas of St. Charles in light of these kinds of trends. It suggests how to support existing business areas and what types of new retail and service development would be appropriate. The purpose of this Chapter is to insure that commercial areas fit into a well-planned physical design for the community while providing necessary goods and services to the citizens as well as revenue to the City.

Three primary shopping districts are examined in this Chapter:

1. Downtown – generally bounded by the Union Pacific railroad to the north, 5th Avenue to the east, Prairie Street to the south and 5th Street to the west. As the historic and geographic center of the community, downtown is the most significant identifying feature of the City. Natural amenities and historic development patterns have produced a pleasant pedestrian scale. This has enabled it to evolve into a restaurant and entertainment district with fine locally owned shops as well as antiques.
2. East Gateway – generally bounded by Foxfield Drive on the north, Pheasant Run on the east, Illinois Avenue on the south, and Dunham Road on the west. The Charlestowne Mall, a mid-size fashion center, anchors the East Gateway. Auto-oriented suburban development is the second primary component. This Chapter provides a direction for future development of the vacant land that remains.
3. West Gateway – generally the area along and 1/4 mile to the west of Randall Road, bounded by Dean Street on the north and the corporate limits on the south. As the oldest auto-oriented commercial district on Randall Road in Kane County, the West Gateway holds the greatest challenges. In terms of planned future development, it is the largest

commercial district in the City. Currently, more than half of it is vacant land and some of its developed areas are underutilized. The vacant St. Charles Mall was an anchor, but now presents a challenge as retailers look to draw from the synergy of the new Randall Road retail corridor to the south. Randall Road itself is planned for expansion to six lanes. The personality of this auto-oriented district will evolve, centering on necessities such as groceries, general merchandise, and home improvement.

Commercial land uses are also found on Main Street in two connecting corridors, between downtown and West Gateway, and again between downtown and the East Gateway. These two Main Street corridors have a wide variety of sizes and types of commercial development as well as residential uses.

II. FINDINGS

A. The Fiscal Impact of Commercial Development

Sales taxes comprise about 46% of the City's annual net operating revenue (excluding utility funds), so their importance to the City's ability to provide services is self-evident.

In recent years, the City's position as the primary location for retail in the Tri-Cities area has changed as neighboring communities have built their own shopping areas. One statistic that identifies this trend is that after over 20 years of annual increases averaging 10 percent or more, sales tax receipts failed to increase from 1996 to 1998. The data is disturbing because the slowdown occurred at a time when the City's sales tax rate increased from 1% to 1.25%, and population growth and economic conditions in the region were very strong. More people were spending more money and were being taxed at a higher rate, but St. Charles did not see any increase in sales tax revenues.

Through the sales tax and increasing commercial activity, St. Charles has consistently been able to maintain low property taxes and quality services. Therefore, finding a way to continue commercial growth and to maintain existing commercial activity is crucial.

FIGURE 9- 1
SALES TAX RECEIPTS (Fiscal Year Total)

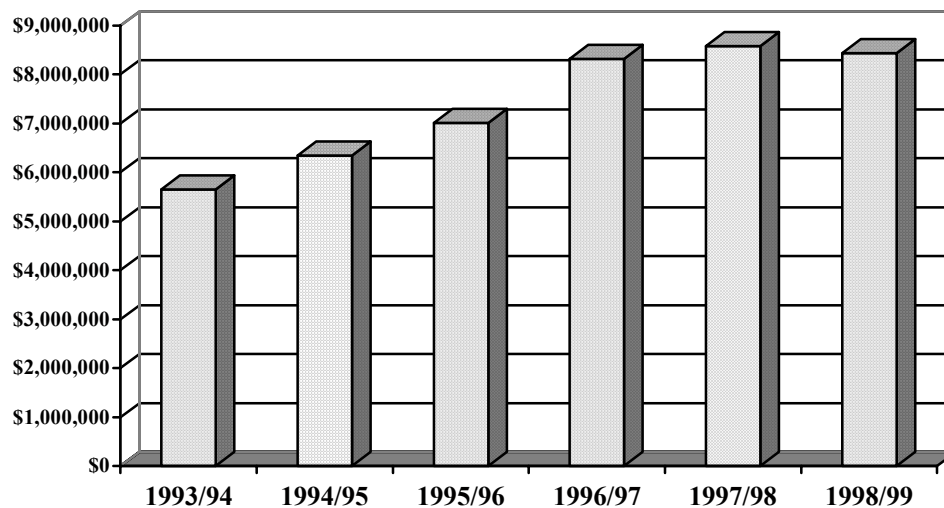
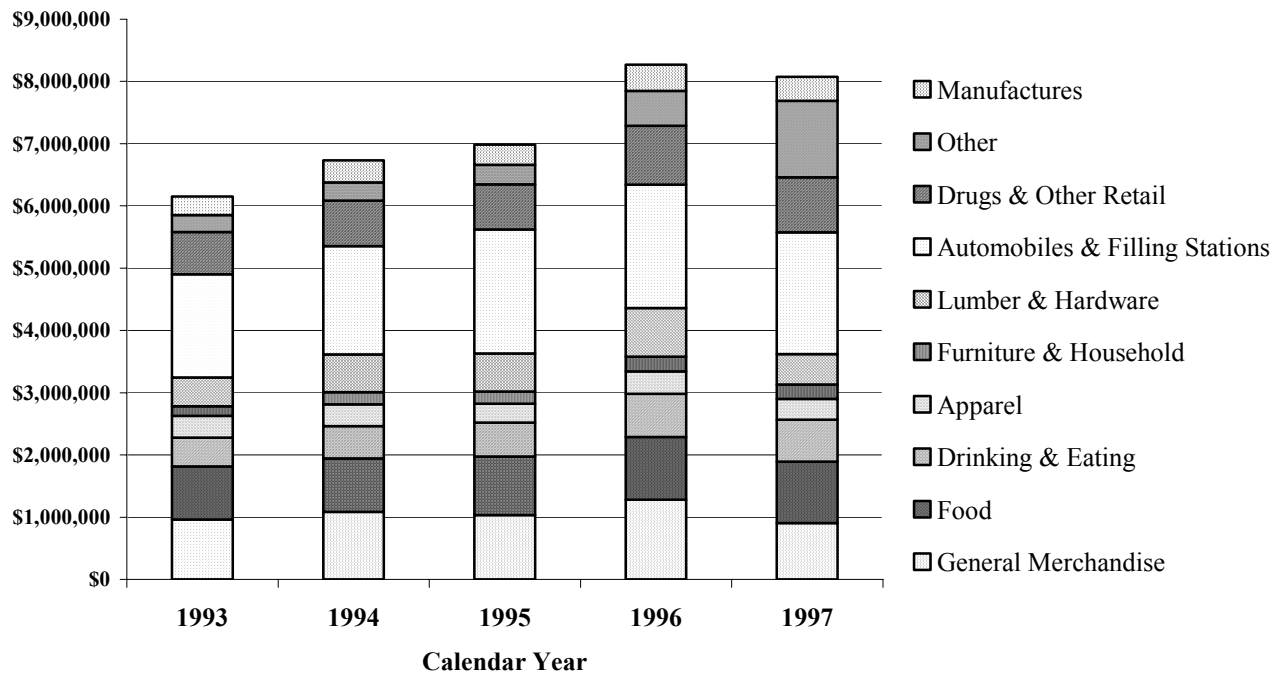


FIGURE 9-2
SALES TAX RECEIPTS BY TYPE OF BUSINESS



B. The Downtown Area

Appendix A entitled “Downtown St. Charles Strategy Plan/An Appendix to the City of St. Charles Comprehensive Plan” prepared by Downtown Professionals Network, dated November 8, 2000 provides an analysis of the downtown area, establishes goals and guidelines, and sets forth an implementation strategy. It encompasses the key elements of the Comprehensive Plan with respect to downtown St. Charles.

C. The East and West Gateway Areas

The East and West Gateway areas encompass a mix of developed and undeveloped land along major traffic arteries. This combination of arterial street location, existing commercial uses, and vacant land is unique and presents an opportunity to meet several

goals. How the Gateway areas are finally developed will affect community character, availability of goods and services, and the City's financial health.

Each Gateway should be viewed as a whole, with individual projects evaluated on how well they fit within the goals for the Gateways and the City. Although commercial development will be dominant, other uses such as multi-family and office are appropriate in some locations. Different uses should be located and designed to complement each other. Nonresidential uses in both Gateways should be contained so that they do not spread beyond their planned boundaries, infringing on residential areas.

A system of public streets and/or semipublic access roads should be located so as to disperse or lessen traffic movements at the Randall/Route 64 intersection. This system would provide access to uses in the northwest, northeast, and southwest quadrants of that intersection. Traffic interruptions on arterial streets should be kept to a minimum by limiting private access and coordinating cross streets. Additional intersections should be limited to those that will enhance traffic circulation and safety. Proposed streets and roads must also complement the City's existing street network and be sensitive to other development in the area.

The design of project aesthetics, architecture and function need to be carefully coordinated and scrutinized throughout the review process. Strip commercial development consisting of individual sites that are not coordinated in their access and design should not be permitted. Commercial centers or clusters, as well as fast food courts and shared parking areas provide an alternative. Outparcels developed after the main cluster under separate ownership can hide or detract from quality commercial development. Therefore, outparcel design should be part of the larger project review.

Specific design guidelines for project review were developed as the "East Gateway Standards" in 1991, and were extended to apply to the West Gateway area in 1996. This updated version of those guidelines should be used in evaluating all projects in the East and West Gateway areas.

EAST AND WEST GATEWAY DESIGN GUIDELINES

1. Land Use and Zoning

In order to promote growth and development that is attractive, has long-term viability, and supports the tax base of the City, decisions on land use and zoning should:

- a. Be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan;

- b. Give priority to configurations of retail development that can accommodate a variety of uses over time.
- c. Encourage developers to use the Planned Unit Development review process.
- d. Discourage the development of individual lots of less than 40,000-sq. ft. unless they are part of a unified and planned commercial development.

2. **Site Design**

It is the policy of the City to promote quality site design within the East and West Gateway Corridors and to require that sites be planned and designed to:

- a. Reflect the community image goals of the Comprehensive Plan.
- b. Integrate all elements of site design including architecture, signs, parking, access drives, pedestrian facilities, landscaping, and stormwater facilities, and relate the design of these elements to existing development on surrounding properties and the character of St. Charles.
- c. Provide a 50-foot average setback (from existing or anticipated right of way) along arterial streets and a 25-foot average setback along all other streets except where a greater setback is required by the zoning district in which the property is located. Existing properties with lesser setbacks should be enhanced by massing intense landscaping where key opportunities occur. In general, setbacks may be reduced where intensive massing of landscaping and other streetscape features are used to create a sense of place that will enhance the site beyond what would have been achieved by mere distance.
- d. Provide that drive-up facilities, outdoor display of merchandise, and refuse areas will be screened from view from adjoining public streets. Drive-up facilities should be located so as to minimize visibility from arterial and collector streets.
- e. Integrate buildings and site design with existing natural features such as topography, trees, wetlands, prairies, etc.
- f. Provide stormwater storage facilities that are natural in appearance with appropriate landscaping and naturalistic shapes. They should be designed to accommodate passive recreational uses such as pedestrian and bicycle paths, sitting areas, etc.

3. **Landscaping**

Landscaping serves important functional and aesthetic purposes. The landscaping of sites should be carefully planned and designed to:

- a. Provide attractive landscaped areas that include a variety of living plant materials; four season interest and the use of native plant materials are encouraged.
- b. Perform the functional aspects of landscaping such as controlling drainage, preventing erosion, screening incompatible or unsightly uses, providing shade, reducing glare and enhancing the appearance of architectural and site features.
- c. Screen commercial uses from nearby residential areas and school sites using berms, fences and/or plantings.
- d. Preserve existing trees to “soften” the appearance of man-made development, taking care during and after construction to ensure their survival.
- e. Landscape all parking lots with berms, shrubs, evergreens, etc., to provide substantial and immediately effective screening from adjoining rights-of-way.
- f. Where space is limited, provide intensive massing of landscaping in key locations instead of extending it in a linear manner.
- g. Enhance compatibility of the railroad corridor with adjoining development by encouraging cleanup of railroad right of way areas.

4. **Building Architecture**

Building design should strive to maintain and reinforce the character of St. Charles rather than a corporate image. The character of St. Charles is most typically reflected by:

- a. The use of elements compatible with the architectural styles of the community landmarks listed in the Community Image Chapter.
- b. Buildings of masonry construction with all visible sides finished and treated similarly to the front of the building. The use of cement plaster finishes is not preferred, but is acceptable when its color and texture are consistent with masonry materials.
- c. Screening rooftop and ground mechanical equipment (transformers, utility meters, etc.) from view from any public ways or adjacent residential areas.
- d. Compatibility of building materials, colors, fenestration, scale and other architectural design features among all buildings within a development and on adjoining properties.
- e. Use of creative architectural design to make the outlots and the main building appear as a unified development, but with variety and interest.

5. Off-Street Parking and Loading

Proper planning of off-street parking and loading areas can provide a physically attractive streetscape as well as functional and safe access. Parking and loading areas should be designed to:

- a. Locate parking at the sides or rear of buildings rather than in front whenever possible to enhance the visibility of building architecture and site landscaping along rights-of-way.
- b. Share driveways and link parking areas and circulation drives to reduce the number of turns onto and off of the principal roadways;
- c. Enhance the appearance of parking lots with ample landscape areas, including islands for shade trees or tree groupings of sufficient size and number to create a canopy effect throughout the parking area;
- d. Locate loading and delivery areas away from view from public streets and pedestrian areas to the greatest extent possible; incorporate service areas into the building design or screen them from view with fencing or landscaping.

6. Vehicular/Pedestrian Traffic

In order to provide accessible, convenient and safe development, vehicular and pedestrian traffic must be designed to:

- a. Require traffic impact studies for development projects that generate 100 or more peak hour, peak direction vehicle trips.
- b. Maximize the use of shared curb cuts and control the number and spacing of access drives to minimize conflict points, particularly on arterial streets.
- c. Make entryways clearly visible through the use of landscaping, curbing, signage and/or pavement markings.
- d. Facilitate safe pedestrian movement in large parking lots by providing walkways and pedestrian islands that are separate from automobile traffic.
- e. Design and landscape pedestrian ways with attractive paving materials, shade trees, street furniture, scenic views and other amenities to facilitate and encourage walking between uses. Where appropriate, sidewalks and walkways may meander to provide interest or avoid existing obstacles.
- f. Incorporate transit vehicle access and provide attractive and convenient waiting areas

and shelters to facilitate the use of public transportation.

- g. Consider use of the Union Pacific railroad corridor for extension of Great Western Trail if railroad use ceases.

7. **Signs and Lighting**

Signs and lighting have necessary functions such as use identification and site and building security. Signs and lighting should also complement architectural and site features, being designed and located so as to:

- a. Consolidate and limit the number of signs per lot to only those necessary to identify a use or tenant and to direct traffic;
- b. Provide a landscaped or decorative base for any freestanding signs; use styles, materials and colors that are compatible with principal buildings;
- c. Illuminate certain architectural, landscaping and/or other site features to provide greater visual interest;
- d. Coordinate style, color, height and other elements of lighting standards with architectural and site design, and locate or shield lighting fixtures to avoid intrusion into residential areas and excess glare;
- e. Prohibit billboards and remove any existing billboards as a condition of any annexation or development approval by the City.

C-1: East Gateway Retail Development:

Land in the East Gateway area should be developed to help support the long-term viability of the Charlestowne Mall. The Mall is critical to the future of the City as a revenue base, and to the East Gateway area as an anchor. It also provides goods and services to the citizens of St. Charles in a convenient location.

Retail industry analysts believe that the best way to achieve long term viability of a retail destination such as the Charlestowne Mall is to reach “critical mass.” This means assembling enough retail to optimize consumer convenience. When selecting a business district to visit, consumers will consider the variety of stores and choose a destination dictated by the errand of highest priority, or where the greatest number of errands can be completed. Therefore, a shopping destination that offers more choices will attract more customers. Presently, there may be insufficient “critical mass” of retail in the East Gateway to ensure the long-term success of the Mall as a mid-size shopping center.

Will more retail bring more competition, ultimately defeating the purpose of supporting the Mall? Successful retailers differentiate themselves according to price, geographic location and proximity to economic engines (destinations). In a healthy economy it is possible to create a diversity of retail uses within a shopping district that complement each other, rather than competing head-on. Charlestowne Mall is a fashion center -- goods are generally not “necessity items” such as groceries or toiletries. There are several possibilities for additional retail surrounding the Mall that would complement it. Furniture, appliances, computers, and discount clothing are not well represented in the St. Charles market. Clothing stores that typically locate outside a mall would include discounters, with the stores inside the Mall carrying higher cost items.

C-2: West Gateway Development:

The West Gateway area encompasses four prominent entry corridors into St. Charles: North Randall Road, South Randall Road, West Main Street (Route 64), and Lincoln Highway (Route 38.) These entry corridors present an image of the community to residents and visitors. Unfortunately, that image is not consistently positive.

Some of the shortcomings are due to the presence of older, obsolete development patterns. Some parcels that developed when West Gateway was primarily rural have little landscaping, lack architectural character, and contribute to traffic congestion because of inappropriate access. Unsightly outdoor storage is prominent in some locations. Redevelopment of obsolete sites such as the St. Charles Mall is encouraged.

Properties along Randall Road, Main Street and Lincoln Highway should be developed with quality site design, limited access with appropriate turn lanes and signals, screened outdoor storage, aesthetically pleasing and functional stormwater facilities, and good pedestrian circulation. Rather than establishing a rigid design for all properties to conform with, however, this Plan advocates a flexible approach where key aesthetic features are grouped or clustered to help provide a sense of place, rather than simply being placed in a linear fashion along the street.

A resident or visitor traveling along Randall Road should experience a variety of unique settings that say they are in St. Charles. They should encounter areas of intense landscaping, well designed buildings that relate to the street, ponds or open areas for stormwater storage, aesthetically pleasing signs, inviting parking lots for commercial destinations, and open space. The massing, intensity, and character of all of these features should be designed wherever possible to avoid the “strip” phenomenon where everything looks the same regardless of where you are, and the place has no unique identity.

Unlike the East Gateway with its linear form and focus on the Charlestowne Mall, the West Gateway area will have multiple activity clusters, each with its own focus and mix

of land uses. This complexity is driven by several factors including the presence of Randall Road, Route 64, and Route 38, the Kane County Fairgrounds, existing commercial and multi-family development, the location of undeveloped land, and recent residential development in the western part of the West Gateway land use component.

Commercial development concepts for these key activity clusters include:

Northwest corner Main and Randall, West to NiGas Right of Way:

- Planning for this area must avoid piecemeal development of small parcels that do not fit into a larger context. Compatible land uses, access, traffic circulation, stormwater management, soil conditions and natural features all must be integrated into an overall development plan. This plan must be in place and its feasibility must be assured before smaller sites are developed.
- Internal circulation should be provided by an east-west collector road that connects to Randall Road and Peck Road, as well as to Main Street at a few key locations that can be signalized. Development sites should not have access directly from Main Street or Randall Road, but from this east-west collector and other connecting roads.
- The Randall Road frontage between Main Street and the railroad right of way should be redeveloped by consolidating properties and removing obsolete buildings. Where obsolete buildings are removed for new development, existing businesses should be relocated within the West Gateway area. A large-scale retail facility fronting on Randall Road should be developed if adequate access can be provided from Randall Road and Main Street.
- Architectural character, site development, and landscaping relating to Randall Road should all be top quality so that this section of commercial development on Randall Road is a significant upgrade to the character of the existing Randall Road corridor. It should establish a sense of place to distinguish St. Charles' section of Randall Road from the other retail areas in South Elgin, Geneva and Batavia.
- The area on the north side of Main Street between the Randall Road frontage development and the NiGas right of way should be developed with a mix of light manufacturing, distribution, office, business services, hospitality, contractors, vehicle services, and public storage, as well as restaurants, day care, and other uses that would serve the business area. Retailers that serve both business and retail customers, such as lumber and home improvement stores, would also be appropriate.

- Special attention should be paid to the Main Street frontage so that its appearance from Main Street consists of a variety of attractive buildings, landscaped buffers where less attractive facilities may be located, and appropriate transitions to existing and new development to the east and west.

Northeast and Southeast Corners of Route 64 and Peck Road

- These corners should consist of smaller retail and service establishments that primarily provide goods and services to the surrounding neighborhoods. Their building and site design should express a sense of place and be compatible with surrounding neighborhoods. Buildings and landscaping should be the most prominent visual features, rather than parking lots and driveways.

Fairgrounds Site:

- Southwest corner of Main and Randall should be developed for a retail center possibly mixed with office uses.
- Majority of the site will be Fairgrounds uses, possibly including exposition center, multi-purpose arena, hotel/convention center, improved fairgrounds facilities

Former St. Charles Mall Site:

- Retail development is the City's "first choice" for this site.
- Consider a strong identifier or unique feature, as well as increased building height, to gain more prominence as a retail site.
- If major retail development is not feasible, consider mixed use development including multi-story residential, neighborhood retail and service, and employment. Opportunities should be pursued for integrating quality affordable housing into this type of mixed use development. The design of any mixed use development on this site should result in a pedestrian scale, walkable neighborhood that is integrated with nearby neighborhoods, transportation routes, and services.
- Keep options open for a variety of redevelopment opportunities but do not pursue short-term "solutions" that do not contribute to the quality and viability of the area.

D. Main Street Corridors

Commercial development located in a linear pattern along major highways is commonly referred to as “strip commercial”. This term often has a negative connotation because strip commercial development can project an image of confusion and complexity resulting from an unsightly clutter of signs, traffic congestion and operational problems, incompatible land uses, lack of landscaping and other amenities, and poor property maintenance. This is not the community image desired by St. Charles.

This section is specifically concerned with two Main Street corridors: Fifth Avenue to Dunham Road on the east side and Fifth Street to Randall Road on the west side. To be effective, corridor planning and controls must extend beyond the right of way to encompass a larger area that is functionally and aesthetically related to the roadway. Effective zoning controls can enhance the visual quality of these corridors and well-planned corridors can be a distinct and aesthetically pleasing part of the City’s overall design.

As in many cities, St. Charles’ existing corridors have developed in a piecemeal manner over the years. Uncoordinated and poorly designed commercial development that does not relate to adjoining uses or to the function of the corridor as a whole impairs community appearance goals and adversely impacts the arterial street function. The lack of integrated planning creates complexity and confusion, increases accident potential, impairs pedestrian movement, causes additional traffic congestion and affects property values.

Strip development does not work visually and functionally because too much disorderly information is presented, creating visual chaos. The corridors comprise a variety of uses, from business to commercial to residential. Mixed land uses along the corridors can be successful with proper forethought, but not when developed helter-skelter over a long period as in the past. Commercial and business areas must be designed for efficiency and safety. The integrity of residential areas must be preserved. Where business uses infringe on residential uses the business uses should convert older homes instead of constructing new buildings, to retain residential character.

Both the East and West Main Street corridors have a mixture of residential, regional retail, local retail, office, industrial and other uses. However, each of these corridors has its own character: the west side has considerably more residential use; the east side is more intensely commercial. It is recommended that plans be developed for each of these corridors. An initial step in the planning process will be an assessment of existing conditions and problems. Public participation will be especially important not only to identify needs but also to gain support, resolve conflicts and achieve consensus among the numerous property owners, business operators and residents. The corridor plans should include:

- Definition of overall role and function of corridor;
- Techniques for improving the relationship between the corridor and adjoining neighborhoods;
- Corridor land use plan;
- Indication of parcels or areas to be 1) maintained and protected; 2) improved or rehabilitated; 3) redeveloped;
- Design guidelines for streetscape improvements (e.g. street lights, signs, trees, and landscaping), sidewalks and/or other pedestrian system;
- Design guidelines for improving and upgrading existing buildings and structures;
- Design guidelines for redevelopment and new construction including setbacks, landscaping, parking and storage areas, buffering, and signage.
- Recommendations regarding the location and number of curb cuts, cross access easements and other traffic operational improvements.

Appropriate zoning and other land development ordinances should be reviewed and revised as needed to implement the corridor plans.

III. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A. Facilitate the revitalization of the downtown area. (Note: Items 2 through 9 in this section are also found in the Downtown Strategy Plan Appendix, but are listed there as “Guiding Principles for Downtown St. Charles Design and Development”)

1. Continue to be part of and promote a public/private partnership for planning and implementing the revitalization of the downtown.
2. Promote developments and improvements that provide for the public’s enjoyment of continuous waterfront activities.
3. Preserve architectural and historic integrity.
4. Promote a pedestrian-friendly, aesthetically pleasing, interesting and safe environment.
5. Preserve small town character.
6. Solidify and maintain a vibrant and diverse retail base that promotes a quality shopping experience.
7. Prioritize underutilized parcels and corridors for redevelopment.
8. Promote a 24-hour environment featuring a variety of land uses.
9. Offer family oriented experiences and activities for all ages and incomes.

B. Enhance the functional and visual quality of the Main Street Corridors.

1. Develop long range plans for the East and West Main Street corridors.
2. Minimize curb cuts along Main Street by encouraging shared driveways and parking lots.
3. Develop a coordinated comprehensive signage program for the Main Street Corridors.
4. Preserve the integrity of existing residential land uses along the Main Street Corridors.

C. Maintain the overall character and aesthetics of the community in the East and West Gateway areas while redeveloping underdeveloped areas and adding new commercial uses.

1. Encourage new retail and service uses in the East Gateway area to complement the

goods and services offered by the Charlestowne Mall and to provide a “critical mass” of shopping opportunities.

2. Work toward developing each Gateway as a single component that projects a defined and desired image of the City.
3. In project reviews, strongly encourage individual projects in the Gateway areas to be compatible with and linked to surrounding development.
4. Outparcels within the Gateway areas should be coordinated with and designed as part of the larger development.

D. Maintain a strong commercial base within St. Charles.

1. Within the three primary commercial areas, encourage growth and the improvement of existing commercial development.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION STATEMENT

This Chapter focuses on the three primary commercial areas of the City: Downtown, East Gateway, and West Gateway. The land designated for retail and service in the East Gateway area has been expanded to allow for the creation of a critical mass to attract shoppers and support the Charlestowne Mall. Downtown has benefited from substantial infrastructure investment and a downtown revitalization organization recognized as one of the best in the state. The next challenge will be to attain quality development and redevelopment in the West Gateway/Randall Road area.

In the last five years the following were accomplished in furtherance of the objectives of this Chapter:

- The East Gateway area has developed with major retail facilities to complement the Charlestowne Mall.
- Adoption of a Tax Increment Financing Redevelopment Project Area to encourage redevelopment of the former St. Charles Mall.
- A public/private partnership group is actively engaged in downtown revitalization.
- Adoption of the Downtown Strategy Plan 2000.
- Adoption of a Tax Increment Financing Redevelopment Project Area and a Business District for the First Street Redevelopment project.
- Adoption of the River Corridor Master Plan.

The five-year implementation plan for achieving the goals and objectives of this chapter includes:

1. Refine the strategies, objectives and standards for development and redevelopment of the West Gateway/Randall Road area.
2. Developing a plan to better manage and increase the supply of downtown parking spaces.
3. Through the Downtown Partnership, explore existing and future marketing opportunities in connection with bicycle traffic.